

The music migrated north, from Mississippi Delta to Memphis to my hometown in Chicago. It helped lay the foundation for rock and roll and R&B and hip-hop. It inspired artists and audiences around the world. And as tonight's performers will demonstrate, the blues continue to draw a crowd. Because this music speaks to something universal. No one goes through life without both joy and pain, triumph and sorrow. The blues gets all of that, sometimes with just one lyric or one note.

And as we celebrate Black History Month, the blues reminds us that we've been through tougher times before. That's why I'm proud to have these artists here, and not just as a fan, but also as the President. Because their music teaches us that when we find ourselves at a

crossroads, we don't shy away from our problems. We own them. We face up to them. We deal with them. We sing about them. We turn them into art. And even as we confront the challenges of today, we imagine a brighter tomorrow, saying, I can do it, just like Muddy Waters did all those years ago.

With that in mind, please join me in welcoming these extraordinary artists to the White House. And now, it is my pleasure to bring out our first performer to the stage, the King of the Blues, Mr. B.B. King.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:22 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to musician Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews.

Remarks at a Groundbreaking Ceremony for the National Museum of African American History and Culture *February 22, 2012*

Thank you so much. Please, have a seat. Thank you very much. Well, good morning, everybody.

I want to thank France for that introduction and for her leadership at the Smithsonian. I want to thank everybody who helped to make this day happen. I want to thank Laura Bush; Secretary Salazar; Sam Brownback; my hero, Congressman John Lewis; Wayne Clough; and everybody who's worked so hard to make this possible.

I am so proud of Lonnie Bunch, who came here from Chicago, I want to point out. [*Laughter*] I remember having a conversation with him about this job when he was planning to embark on this extraordinary journey. And we could not be prouder of the work that he has done to help make this day possible.

I promise to do my part by being brief.

As others have mentioned, this day has been a long time coming. The idea for a museum dedicated to African Americans was first put forward by Black veterans of the Civil War. And years later, the call was picked up by members of the civil rights generation, by men and women who knew how to fight for what

was right and strive for what is just. This is their day. This is your day. It's an honor to be here to see the fruit of your labor.

It's also fitting that this museum has found a home on the National Mall. As has been mentioned, it was on this ground long ago that lives were once traded, where hundreds of thousands once marched for jobs and for freedom. It was here that the pillars of our democracy were built, often by Black hands. And it is on this spot, alongside the monuments to those who gave birth to this Nation and those who worked so hard to perfect it, that generations will remember the sometimes difficult, often inspirational, but always central role that African Americans have played in the life of our country.

This museum will celebrate that history. Because just as the memories of our earliest days have been confined to dusty letters and faded pictures, the time will come when few people remember drinking from a colored water fountain or boarding a segregated bus or hearing in person Dr. King's voice boom down from the Lincoln Memorial. That's why what we build here won't just be an achievement for our

time, it will be a monument for all time. It will do more than simply keep those memories alive.

Just like the Air and Space Museum challenges us to set our sights higher, or the Natural History Museum encourages us to look closer, or the Holocaust Museum calls us to fight persecution wherever we find it, this museum should inspire us as well. It should stand as proof that the most important things in life rarely come quickly or easily. It should remind us that although we have yet to reach the mountaintop, we cannot stop climbing.

And that's why, in moments like this, I think about Malia and Sasha. I think about my daughters, and I think about your children, the millions of visitors who will stand where we stand long after we're gone. And I think about what I want them to experience. I think about what I want them to take away.

When our children look at Harriet Tubman's shawl or Nat Turner's Bible or the plane flown by Tuskegee Airmen, I don't want them to be seen as figures somehow larger than life. I want them to see how ordinary Americans could do extraordinary things, how men and women just like them had the courage and determination to right a wrong, to make it right.

I want my daughters to see the shackles that bound slaves on their voyage across the ocean and the shards of glass that flew from the 16th

Street Baptist church and understand that injustice and evil exist in the world. But I also want them to hear Louis Armstrong's horn and learn about the Negro League and read the poems of Phyllis Wheatley. And I want them to appreciate this museum not just as a record of tragedy, but as a celebration of life.

When future generations hear these songs of pain and progress and struggle and sacrifice, I hope they will not think of them as somehow separate from the larger American story. I want them to see it as central, an important part of our shared story, a call to see ourselves in one another, a call to remember that each of us is made in God's image. That's the history we will preserve within these walls, the history of a people who, in the words of Dr. King, "injected new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization."

May we remember their stories. May we live up to their example. Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:21 a.m. on the National Mall. In his remarks, he referred to France A. Cordova, Chair, Smithsonian Institution Board of Regents; former First Lady Laura Bush; and Lonnie G. Bunch, Director, National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Statement on the Observance of Ash Wednesday *February 22, 2012*

Today Michelle and I honor Ash Wednesday with Christians around the country and across the world. This is at once a solemn and joyous occasion, an opportunity to remember both the

depths of sacrifice and the height of redemption. We join millions in entering the Lenten season with truly thankful hearts, mindful of our faith and our obligations to one another.

Statement on Tax Code Reform *February 22, 2012*

In my State of the Union, I laid out a blueprint for an economy that's built to last, where everyone gets a fair shot, everyone pays their fair share, and everyone plays by the same set of rules. That includes a Tax Code that rewards

companies who invest and create jobs in the United States of America.

Our current corporate tax system is outdated, unfair, and inefficient. It provides tax breaks for moving jobs and profits overseas and